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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

NEACH HILL, DONINGTON, SHROPSHIRE

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Statement of Significance: Neach Hill, Near Donington, Shropshire

1. Introduction

This statement of significance is the result of desk-based research and a rapid site walkover to identify extant key features. It is designed to provide sufficient and proportionate information about the history of Neach Hill (hereafter described as the Site) and its significance to help inform future plans for development. As such it is not intended to be a comprehensive survey. In particular, the interior and courtyard spaces adjacent to the main house were not accessible due to safety-related restrictions.

Neach Hill is a Grade II listed building located in the Parish of Donington in Shropshire, bounded on its southern edge by Long Lane and by Neachley Lane to the west, and abutting the estates of Tong Castle and Killshall House to the north and east. The principal building sits at the heart of an established complex comprising a coach house, gardeners' compound (known as Bottom Yard), walled garden and lodge, all of which is set within a park and garden that is approached from the south east along a mile long avenue entered from Long Lane.

A number of buildings and features date to the early 19th century, and appear to have been conceived as a single design. A change of ownership in the later 19th century saw a significant period of alteration with changes to the house, the addition of Bottom Yard, a Lodge, and a substantial greenhouse to the walled garden. Key elements of the Picturesque-style gardens, now very much overgrown, also may have been laid out at this time.

Subsequently, there seems to have been little change until the Site was commandeered by RAF Cosford during World War II and the well-preserved remains of numerous RAF bomb shelters and associated access routes are still visible in discrete areas of the wider parkland.

From the outset, the relationship between the Site and neighbouring estates was important in terms of views and familial associations, Although the well-wooded Site is set within a wide, flat landscape dominated to the south by the expanse of RAF Cosford, and some of its context has been affected by the construction of the M54 to the north and railway to the south, its elevated position still has the potential to afford views of the rolling Shropshire countryside beyond.

In 2005 the present owner purchased the Site but retained the previous owners' son as a tenant. He, however, defaulted on rent and in 2007 legal proceedings were begun to evict him which continued until 2014. During this period the house became notorious for rave parties and the property was stripped of saleable assets, including slates and roofing lead, and there were a number of fires. Since 2014 the house has been vacant and is in very poor repair.

Despite its condition, the grade II listed house is of national significance and the ancillary buildings, landscaped gardens and parkland, as well as the later use of the site for RAF Cosford, all make a positive contribution to the value and significance of the Site.

2. History of the Site and its evolution

Neach Hill sits within a riparian landscape of rolling hills and steep sided valleys which has attracted settlement through the ages, especially 200 metres north of the Site where the River Worfe splits to form a spit of land or ‘tongue’ (Jeffery, 2007). The major Roman road, Watling Street, passes only 2.5 miles north of the Site and archaeological excavations on the tongue during the construction of the nearby M54 revealed the remains of a rectilinear enclosure of possible Iron Age date (Shropshire HER ref 02498).

Occupation of the ‘tongue’ continued throughout the medieval period and there is archaeological evidence dating from the 12th century onwards, with Tong (tongue) Castle having been recorded by the 13th century (Shropshire HER ref 01359 and 07551). This early manorial development may have coincided with the foundation of a monastic Grange of the White Ladies at Neachley Farm, a site immediately adjacent to the northern boundary of the Neach Hill estate (Shropshire HER ref 01818), and the establishment of a mill at Tong Manor, which was first mentioned in records in 1296 and shown on mapping south of the river in 1359 (Shropshire HER ref 01816).

In the 1500’s the Medieval castle at Tong is believed to have been remodelled by Sir Harry Vernon, the head of a rich and prominent family under Henry VII. This heralded a period of heightened prosperity in the area, which included the development of a coaching inn at Killshall, adjacent to the Newport to Wolverhampton road. The converted remains of this inn became the home and estate of the Bishton family in the 18th century (Jeffery, 2007; Shropshire HER ref 13803). The Bishton family were local gentry, and there are references to a John Bishton of Killshall, the adjacent estate to Neach Hill, dating back to at least the mid-1700s, which describe him as the Lord of Donington Manor.

John Bishton’s will of 1806 records that his sons, George and Thomas, inherited his substantial estate, which included the land that Neach Hill was built on (Shropshire Archives record Ref D3651/B/117/1). It therefore seems likely that the Bishton family commissioned the construction of the house and gardens at Neach Hill in the early 19th century.



Figure 1: Roque 1752 Actual Survey of the County of Salop (British Library: Map 4900)

The map clearly shows the U-shaped Tong Castle and radiating avenues of its early 18th century park to the north of Neach Hill. To the south of the river it shows the site of the inn at Killshall.

Roque’s map of Shropshire shows the location of the Site as being fields in 1752 (Figure 2) but by 1814, Dawson’s map of East Shropshire shows the Site as containing the principal house, coach house and walled garden, accessed via a long avenue from the newly formed Long Lane, as well as a potential access from the north (Dawson, 1814-17). Access from Neachley Lane is not clearly defined, although there is evidence of some formalised planting in this area.



Figure 3: Dawson's Map of East Shropshire and Staffordshire of 1814-17, showing the newly set out Neach Hill with adjacent walled garden and long curving avenue to Long Lane.

(British Library: OSD 280)

Some 20 years later, in 1839, Thomas Bishton's son and George Bishton, declared themselves bankrupt and placed both the Killshall and Neach Hill estates up for sale. The sale particulars of the property in 1839 describe '*an elegant and commodious Mansion House, of modern structure, called Neach Hill House, which comprises spacious marble entrance and inner vestibules, dining and drawing rooms.....morning and anterooms on the ground floor, 10 best bedrooms with dressing rooms adjoining on the first floor and 11 other bedrooms: A conservatory or vinery is attached. There are two double Coach Houses with stabling for 12 horse and extensive Gardens and Pleasure Grounds*' (Shropshire Archives ref 1781/2/370-1).

Soon after the sale, the estate at Neach Hill is shown on the Donington Parish Tithe Map of 1842, providing little more detail than the map of 1814-17, but confirming the core components of the original complex and showing the principal house with a portico to the main, southern, elevation, two uneven wings to the rear and a small projection to the western elevation. To the north of the house is a U-shaped coach house, accessed from a service road from Neachley Lane, and a large walled garden shown as a square. A long avenue with a wide entrance provided the main access to the estate from Long Lane (National Archives, IR 30/29/109).



Figure 4: Tithe Map of 1842 showing the site at Neach Hill, with (right) detail of the house and structures in the immediate vicinity of the house (National Archives, IR 30/29/109)

Correspondence in the Shackerley papers suggests that Neach Hill house was sold to one of the 14 legitimate children of the infamous George Durant II of Tong Castle, Bruce Ernest Alphonso Durant (Shropshire Archives, Ref. D3657/2/15). Ernest was also a rather notorious figure, appearing in local newspapers and his fathers' letters, in which he was described as having attempted to murder one of his brothers and for blowing up a Follie on the announcement of his father's death (Jeffery, 2007).

Shortly after the sale of the property, Neach Hill was visited by the renowned railway artist, Isaac Shaw, who sketched the front elevation of the house from a position on the south lawn. The drawing may have formed part of a series of sketches of Shropshire country houses that Shaw undertook in c.1842, which seem to have been carried out as part of field visits to the area in advance of the construction of the Shrewsbury and Birmingham Railway from 1846-9, half a mile from Neach Hill (Shropshire Archive ref PR/2/123).

By 1874, W Hatton Esq had become the owner of Neach Hill and set about making some alterations to the property, which included commissioning a series of plans and elevations of the main house from local Wolverhampton architects, Bidlake and Fleeming.

The drawings from c.1870, illustrate 'as existing' and 'as proposed' details, thereby capturing plans and elevations of the pre-1870 buildings. These 'as existing' drawings show a Classical building of the early 19th century with its principal elevation to the south and comprising a symmetrical elevation bounded by two pilasters, prominent eaves, string courses, and a well proportioned portico carried on four columns at the entrance (Figure 5). To the western elevation, a loggia, which could be contemporary with the original house, is faintly visible (Figure 9).



Figure 5: Drawings for W Hatton Esq c. 1870 by Bidlake & Fleeming. Main (south) elevation of the Principal House showing the house in its original form of c1814 and casement/French windows apparently in situ by this date

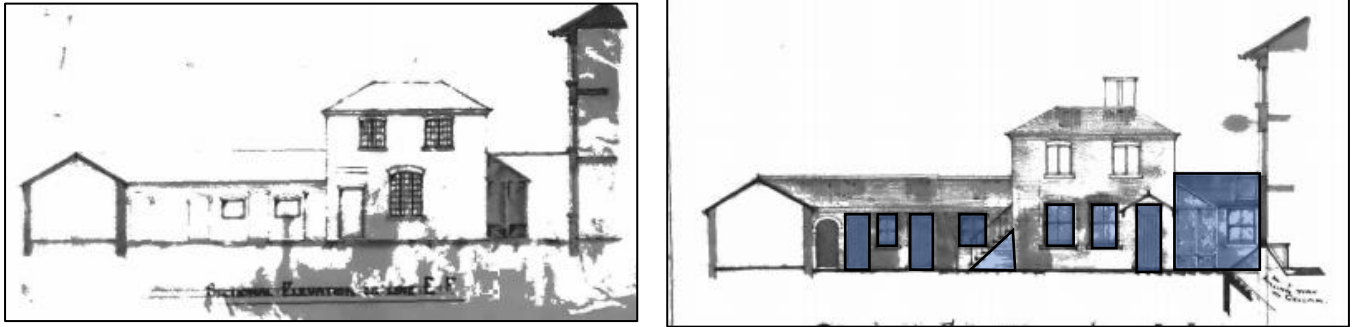
Whilst a comparison of the Shaw and Bidlake and Fleeming drawings show no discernible change in the appearance of the main (south) elevation, the 'as proposed' drawings for the ground floor windows to the east elevation were shown as being altered to casements, with two of the windows being adapted to doors opening out onto the east lawn (figure 6).



Figure 6: Drawings for W Hatton Esq c. 1870 by Bidlake & Fleeming: 'proposed' East elevation showing the two storey laundry/kitchen wing to the north of the principal house and casement windows and doors to the ground floor.

The 1870's drawings also show an East Wing, stylistically different to the principal building, formed by ancillary brick buildings, all of which are associated with domestic service. The buildings face into an inner courtyard and comprise 5 rooms, one of which is two storied and houses a laundry above a kitchen. The remainder form single storey units which probably served as ancillary storage.

The drawings also show proposals for the alteration of the single storey ancillary structures to the north of the kitchen/laundry. The physical evidence (see Section 3) suggests that not all of the proposals were fully implemented in the form shown here.



Figures 7 & 8: (Left) Drawings for W Hatton Esq c. 1870 by Bidlake & Fleeming. As existing showing the East wing west elevation (viewed from internal courtyard) and (Right) As proposed. The two storey section is the kitchen with laundry above, the proposed changes are highlighted in blue.

There were also some significant changes proposed to the appearance of the west elevation of the West Wing (shown in grey highlight), including additional fenestration and the creation of a new roof structure above a Billiards Room (at first floor level) to support the addition of a clock turret or louvered ventilator.



Figures 9 & 10: As Existing and Proposed' drawings prepared for W Hatton Esq c. 1870 by Bidlake & Fleeming: West elevation showing the main house with loggia and a two storey west wing. The proposals incorporated a Billiards Room to the first floor, denoted by a small clock turret or louvered ventilator to the roofline. Proposed alterations are highlighted in grey.

In particular, the element to the most northern extent, the servants' hall, which was originally heated by a large external chimney with three flues (figure 9), was proposed to have a floor inserted, the chimney removed and its 18 light sash windows reduced to accommodate a new stair and enable both floors to be lit. Having originally only been entered from the servants' courtyard, these

alterations intended to turn its main aspect to face the Coach House, and included four new square sash windows and a central door.

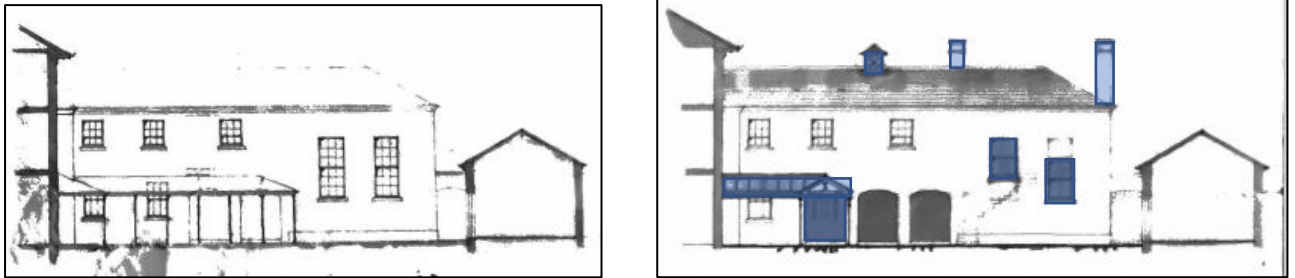


Figure 11 & 12: (left) Drawings for W Hatton Esq c. 1870 by Bidlake & Fleeming: West Wing east elevation (viewed from internal courtyard) with servants' hall shown with long window and (right) as proposed

The 1870s drawings show that the plan form was set around a central atrium and grand staircase. The two principal rooms of the dining and drawing room are located to the east with a sitting room and library to the west. All the main rooms have fireplaces and the drawing clearly shows the distinction between the main house, senior servants rooms and the two lower servants wings which are separated by a servants 'back stair'.

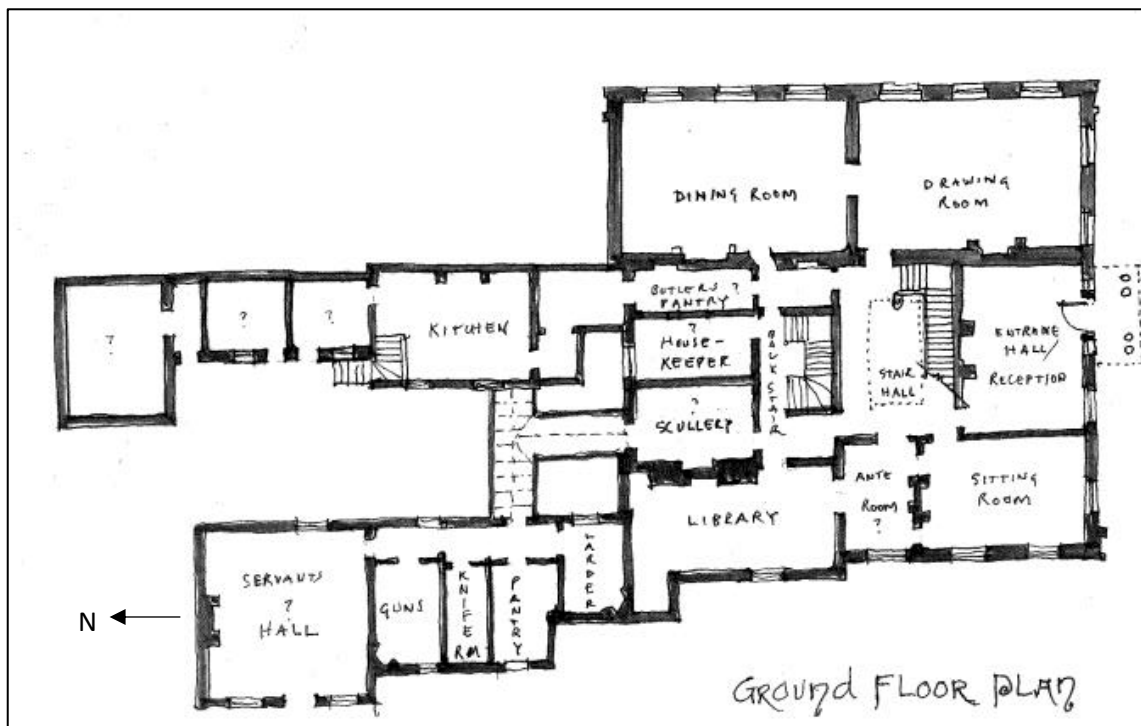


Figure 12: Ground Floor Plan annotated and derived from drawings for W Hatton Esq c. 1870 by Bidlake & Fleeming: Ground floor by Arrols Architects

The first floor plans of c.1870 show five heated main bedrooms, two with dressing rooms, accessed directly from the main stairwell; a series of service rooms and a sixth, smaller bedroom accessible from the back stairs. A Billiards Room was proposed at first floor level and heated by a large corner fireplace. A further three small bedrooms were accessed via a third internal stair above the servants hall. Five bedrooms are shown in the attic space and four cellars are situated to the front of the main house in the south west corner, all were accessed via the back stairs.

In the basement a barrel run was inserted linked to what may have been three new cellars, and at first floor level a series of rooms were proposed for subdivision to provide bathrooms and water closets.



Figure 14: Drawings prepared for W Hatton Esq c. 1870 by Bidlake & Fleeming: First Floor Plan. The proposed elements have been highlighted in blue



Figure 15: Historic mapping of 1881 showing the house and gardens at Neach Hill in the late 19th century (Ordnance Survey, 1887). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

The first edition Ordnance Survey map, based on a survey of 1881, clearly shows a considerable number of additions to the estate from those in 1842 (Figure 15). These include extensions to the servants' wings, the development of a range of ancillary buildings, known as Bottom Yard, to the north of the coach house, the addition of a large glasshouse and bothie to the south facing elevation of the walled garden, and a lodge adjacent to the entrance from Long Lane (Ordnance Survey, 1887).

Later maps show that the estate continued to be developed over the next 20 years, but on a lesser scale. The second edition Ordnance Survey map illustrates a similar character to that of the 1880s, but with some further structural additions to the gardener's compound, Bottom yard, against the southern and northern sides of the courtyard and the east elevation of the long linear barn. Small square additions are also discernible against the west elevation of the Servants Hall and the north elevation of the 1870s addition to the East Wing, which may have housed generators and relate to the electrification of the property (Ordnance Survey, 1903).

Development of the Garden

The main focus of change in the later 19th century was in the development of the gardens and the infrastructure to support their management. During the early 19th century the British past-time of plant collecting and gardening developed at pace, gradually becoming more accessible to the lesser gentry as technology improved and the industry became formalised. In the 1840's and 50's, a series of events, including the repeal of the glass tax in 1845 and the development of nurseries precipitated an explosion in gardening, and more specifically the cultivation of new exotics (Uglow, 2005).

Historic mapping indicates that this fashion was widely embraced by Hatton at Neach Hill, as a glasshouse (comparable in scale to the two servants wings combined) was added to the northern wall of the walled garden on its southern elevation, supported by a brick bothie to the rear, adjacent to a well. A further two glasshouses were also added to a newly created gardeners and stock handling compound set around a courtyard, directly north of the coach house (Figure 15). Later references indicate this was known as 'Bottom Yard' and that it comprised, in addition to the glasshouses, a long single storey structure along the eastern elevation, an enclosing wall on the northern elevation and a combination of smaller structures and wall along the western elevation.

The late 19th century map evidence also shows that the gardens and surrounding parkland had become significantly more structured than in 1842, with a network of curved and serendipitous pathways laid out around the core of the garden. A steep-sided wooded 'dingle' had been created from the remains of a 'marl pit' described on the sale particulars of 1839, planted up and absorbed into the garden design. Mapping shows the dingle with a pond at its base and a circuit of pathways through the area that includes a small round feature in a clearing to the west which may have housed a statue, seat or structure. Elsewhere, a 'knoll' had been formed adjacent to the west wing of the Principal Building, and a sunken lawn created in front of the east elevation. Inside the walled garden was a grid of paths, centred on a feature that may be a fountain, with a main entrance sited on the garden's north-south axis in the northern elevation of the wall (Figure 15).

In terms of the wider parkland, a considerable number of interventions are shown which helped to screen and frame the property and enhance the views beyond its boundaries (figure 15). The 1880s map shows a ha-ha running the full length of the northern boundary of the south lawn, and opening the boundary to an unimpeded southward view across the estate to the railway and beyond.

A less defined earthwork sits in front of the eastern elevation of the house, sustaining a view, carefully framed by boundary trees, across the parkland to Kilsall House, the ancestral home of the Bishton family. In the north of the site, a shelterbelt has been developed to help screen the estate from Neachley House and open grown parkland trees punctuate the landscape.

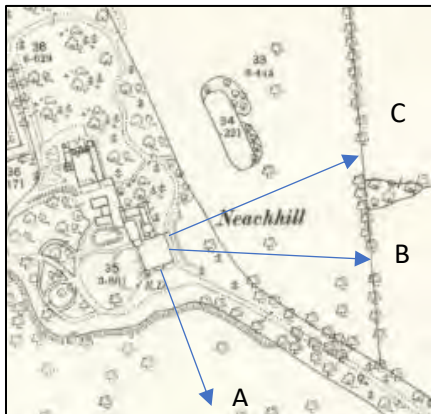


Figure 16: Ordnance Survey mapping of 1887 showing designed views from Neach Hill – A to the Railway and beyond, B to Kilsall House, C to Castle Wood.

Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

The map evidence also shows that design attention was paid to the two approaches to the estate. A small T-shaped lodge had been constructed at the southern entrance to the main avened approach to the house and, with the construction of the gardeners compound, the secondary approach to the house from Neachley Lane was also altered to diverge left towards the main house or right towards Bottom Yard. This provided an opportunity to carry out some landscaping in front of the Coach House and soften the secondary entrance in relation to its impact on the more 'naturalistic' style landscape.

20th Century Developments



Figure 17: (Right) Ordnance Survey mapping of 1903 showing additions to Bottom yard (in blue), in comparison with (Right) the 1887 map (Left) (Ordnance Survey, 1887 and 1903). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

By 1903 there appears to have been a simplification of the path network, with the removal of a circular feature adjacent to the west lawn, which may have been a rose garden, and the introduction

of a straight linear routeway that cut across the garden from Bottom Yard to the East Park. In the wider landscape there were also some small additions: a change in the fence line in the northern corner of the eastern park, with a structure attached, which was probably for stock management, and a linear structure established just north of the walled garden. At the end of the Avenue the small lodge had almost doubled in size and appears to have a small structure within a defined garden area that relates to half of the property, indicating that it was occupied as two units.

Whilst the early years of the 20th century saw little physical change to Neach Hill house and gardens, in 1938 the RAF base at Cosford, just over half a mile away, began a massive and rapid expansion to become a joint aircraft maintenance, storage and technical training college. The demands placed on the base during the Second World War required the co-opting of local landowners into the war effort, and included sites at Neach Hill, Killsall, Tong Castle and the adjacent Neachley House.

Unlike the neighbouring sites, evidence from a composite RAF site map covering the sites development from 1940-1945, suggests that Neach Hill was the site of substantial barracks, bath houses, latrine blocks and shelters that augmented the No2 Training School facilities, with an officer's mess at the end of the avenue, adjacent to Long Lane (which has been retained as the Cosford Auction House) (Francis, 2012).

However, map evidence from 1964 (figure 19) shows the area as a 'depot – disused' and includes upwards of 20 small bomb shelters as well as associated access routes and structures across the east and south parkland areas.



Figure 20: The grounds in 1964, showing the temporary road network, earthworks and structures associated with the world war II depot in the east and south park areas (Ordnance Survey, 1964). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

Whilst the evidence for the adaptation of the 1940s Barracks to Depot is currently somewhat unclear, the physical impact of the use of the house and grounds for the development of Cosford in WWII (and thereafter) appears to have been contained within the east and south park, with little discernible change to any of the principal structures, except for the addition of another small building to the north elevation of the main house (Ordnance Survey, 1964).

However the changes wrought to the surrounding parkland were considerable, as access to the bomb shelters, probably from Neachley Lane, used the straight linear route through the garden by the side of Bottom Yard, and connected with a convoluted network of routes servicing fifteen

subterranean structures and two small square structures that were probably power hubs. A similar number of structures were accessed from the main avenue developed on the south park.

In the later 20th century, Neach Hill was used for an Antiques business, under the name of *Doveridge House of Neach Hill Antiques*, which advertised in *Country Life* from 1984 until around 1996.

A series of planning applications from the 1990s onwards describe a gradual domestication of Bottom Yard and the walled garden, and several parcels of estate land, including the Lodge House, were sold.

In 2005, the present owner purchased the house, and converted the Bothy and the cottages in Bottom Yard into residential use, renting them to local people. The previous owner's son remained as a tenant of the house but defaulted on rent and in 2007 eviction proceedings were begun.

Possession was finally granted in 2014, but in the intervening years the property had fallen into a poor state of repair. The House was locally notorious for 'Rave' parties and the tenant caused significant damage by stripping the house of saleable items including its roofing lead, internal stone flooring (including the marble in the entrance hall) and architectural details such as fireplaces and door surrounds. There had also been a number of fires which caused further damage, particularly to the roof structure.

Since 2014, the property has been vacant and un-usable as any form of residence or commercial space. The damage to the roof has caused ongoing deterioration to the fabric and a drone survey carried out in March 2021 showed that the central lantern light has now collapsed and severely damaged the canter-levered staircase in the main hall below.

3. Existing historic and architectural features of the building and its setting

Overview

The extant structures and buildings on the site comprise six discrete elements: the principal building and rear servant's wings that principally dates to c. 1814 with some alteration and additions in the 1870s; a U-shaped coach house, seemingly unaltered since c.1814; a complex of outbuildings/farmyard, known as 'Bottom Yard' of late 19th century date, which has undergone substantial alteration and is now largely domestic; the walled garden complex of c.1814, that combines a new dwelling with the remains of a 19th century Bothie; the remains of the WWII/post war structures that occupy the east and south parkland, and finally the lodge which sits at the end of the overgrown avenue.



Figure 21: Location map of main complexes, the shaded area shows the extent of the World War II development. (Ordnance Survey © Crown copyright 2021 All rights reserved License number 100022432).

These structures sit within the remains of a designed landscape that comprises a parkland to the south, a mile long tree-lined avenue, and a mature garden punctuated with specimen species, including Cedar of Lebanon and Copper Beech. The garden includes a coherent network of sunken, stone edged paths, a knoll, dingle, east and west lawns and a haha.

The Principal Building



Figure 22: The front and east elevation of the main house prior to boarding up showing casement windows to ground floor of the south elevation and 9/6 sashes to the east elevation

The core of the principal building is of the early 19th century and comprises an almost square, classical stuccoed country house of three storeys. The main elevation faces south and has a portico of coupled Doric columns and recessed niches. To either side are two full length multi-paned casement windows which are of later date. There are 5 architraved glazing bar sash windows to the second and third floors, the top storey being of reduced proportions, flanked either side by substantial corner pilasters reeded with central staff moulding. At first floor level a sill band wraps around to the west elevation but moves to second floor level to the east elevation to mark a change in fenestration that reflects the heightened ceilings of the grand drawing and dining room.

The symmetrical east elevation has 6 sash windows to both ground and first floor, those at the ground floor are full length 9/6 sashes. These may be altered, as two of the openings previously provided access to the garden, with associated stone steps, one set of which have been removed. To the first floor the windows are timber sash windows in the same pattern as those to the south and west elevations but to the ground floor have been boarded. It is possible that these are casement windows, as shown on 'proposed' drawings of the 1870s.

The western elevation is formed by two sections – 'half' being in the same symmetrical style as the main and east elevations but of 3 windows to the ground, first and second floor. A second 'half' is formed by a slightly projecting, two storey stuccoed section with two 3/3 sash windows to the first floor and a narrow door. Stylistically the two elements appear to be coeval and together form the final part of the 'square' floor plan of the main house.

The remains of a cast iron loggia, shown on the plans and elevations of c.1870, are still visible as stumps of uprights and parts of the structure litter the site. The remains appear to be Regency in

style, with a diamond lattice on the linear components and a circular terminus, and probably date to the buildings original construction in the early 19th century. A roof line visible on the side of the house, just below the sill band, appears to be a later adaptation of the original loggia with more modern glazing bars and timbers still evident.



Figure 23: Detail of the Loggia structure (left) and the west and south elevation of the main house showing the roof line (right). Unlike the East elevation, the western elevation comprises a three storey section of 3 windows with an adjacent 2 storey structure

The house is capped by a series of 8 shallow pitched, hipped slate roofs with widespread eaves and a moulded cornice, interrupted by six brick chimney stacks, three on the ridge and three on the structural walls. Most remain only partially intact with the worst of the damage being on the western slope of the east elevation. At the centre of the roof are two light wells, which light the main and back stairs, and which were covered with pitched glass roofs. Only the smaller roof covering the back stairs remains intact.

Interior

For safety reasons, the building is currently inaccessible. However, limited internal photographs of the property provide some evidence for the interiors of the rooms and circulation spaces.

Whilst many of the most significant fixtures and fittings, such as door surrounds, fireplaces and mantelpieces, have been lost, especially in the high status ground floor rooms, considerable evidence for internal decoration of the principal rooms appears to remain. The drawing room, for example, has retained its original classical frieze, panelling and dado rail, together with the profile of the door pediment. The physical evidence suggests that much of the interior remained largely contemporary with the original construction of the building in the early 1800s.

Although much damaged, until very recently the central stair had retained its overall appearance and a delicate early 19th century iron balustrade that sweeps down the open-well cut-string main stair (figure 24). Unfortunately drone survey footage from March 2021 shows that the central hall lantern has now collapsed onto the stair causing catastrophic damage, although the elements still remain in situ, apparently relatively unharmed.



Figure 24: The Drawing room interior (left) and the main stair (right)

The Servants Wings

On the northern elevation of the principal building are two wings that enclose a inner courtyard which is currently inaccessible from the grounds.

Within the courtyard, a short glazed canopy joins the West and East wings and provides covered access between the two buildings.

East Wing

The central section of the East Wing comprises a former Kitchen/Laundry of 2 storeys, constructed in a local version of a Flemish stretcher bond which appears to be characteristic of the earliest phases of construction, together with a two course, stepped eaves detail. It has a hipped slate roof and no openings on its eastern elevation.

To the western elevation it has 2 brick arched casement windows at ground and first floor levels. The lower two windows seem to correspond with those shown on drawings of c.1870, as does an adjacent door into the glass covered walkway and an external stone stair leading to a side doorway at first floor level.



Figure 25: Left: The rear courtyard looking towards the main house. The East Wing is to the left and shows the two storey laundry/kitchen. Right: The east elevation of the East Wing with blocked doorway

Adjoining the former kitchen (to the north) is an L-shaped single storey brick structure with a shallow hipped slate roof, two course stepped eaves detail, and a shallow brick plinth along its eastern elevation. There is a stepped entrance into the building from the east which has been infilled with

brick and may correspond with the doorway that was proposed in the 1870s drawings, but created in a more central location. The short north face of the L-shaped return has a small 1/1 timber window with a brick sill and a blocked doorway.

There is a small square structure of painted four course garden wall brick bond joining the Principal



Figure 26: (left) Later addition, possibly serving the garden with (right) evidence of flags or footings in front of it

Building to the east side of the East Wing. This ancillary structure has a brick arched door and window opening to the east and dates to the minor alterations carried out by 1964. It may have provided services to the house or the garden. A series of flags or stone footings were also noted in this area.

The northern end of the servant's courtyard is enclosed by the return of the single storey ancillary building which forms part of the east wing and abuts the gable end of a larger, single storey brick structure. This again has a three course Flemish stretcher bond, but without the eaves detail and a gabled slate roof. The wall to the rear (north) elevation provides evidence for there having been an adjoining brick pitched roof structure (highlighted by a white painted area), now largely demolished and there is a further small brick structure, largely demolished, at its western edge of garden wall bond, probably dating to the 1900s, and linked to the development of the property's service infrastructure. The western elevation is rendered and has a chimney and two single lights at eaves level.



Figure 27: (left) Corner of the East Wing, showing the adjoining single storey structure (right) which forms the northern boundary to the inner courtyard.

The building is accessed solely through the inner courtyard and has three small single light openings on the south and west elevations, with brick arched heads. A single larger window may survive on

the southern elevation but was not accessible. Two doors that provide access into the structure from the courtyard appear to have the four centred arched headers typical of the 1870's phase of alteration.

The remains of a short, coursed sandstone wall at the northern end of the courtyard links the service wing/ house complex to the corner of the Coach House. It is unclear if this is truncated.

West Wing

The West Wing is currently not easily accessible but, as noted above, is connected to the corner of the principal building via a shorter two storey stuccoed section. The upper floor /roof structure is in serious disrepair but appears to have been altered in the 1870s as part of work to create an irregularly-shaped Billiards Room to the first floor, and which drawings of c.1870 suggest may have had a small light, louver or clock turret. The billiards room continued into the projecting bay to the north (Figure 14).



Figure 28: The inner courtyard as seen from above, highlighting the relationship between the West and East Wings and enclosure to the North.



Figure 29: The 2 storey section of the principal building and the projecting bay which housed the Billiards Room to the first floor.

The visible windows are sash windows, with no architrave, and with stone sills. All are similar in style to those of the principal building, sitting at regular intervals on both elevations.

At the northern end of the west wing is a discrete square structure described on drawings of c1870 as 'the servant's hall' and its construction suggests it may be of early 19th century date. A first floor appears to have been added in the 1870s and there is external evidence for a long windows having been blocked, to form staggered smaller windows that account for the slope of the internal stair. It has four square-headed sash windows, two on either floor and a central doorway and are shown on the 'proposed' drawings of the 1870's.

The Coach House

The coach house lies to the north of the principal building and is a brick building comprising four brick arched cart openings, with haylofts and pitching holes above. It is constructed in a U shaped configuration with three separate hipped roofs of slate, and has the localised Flemish bond brick constructional characteristics of the original phase. The central block served as a stable and tack room with grooms accommodation above, lit by two square casement windows. Entrance to these spaces was configured under a large brick four-centred archway at the centre of the connecting structure.



Figure 30: The central section of the Coach House looking towards the east in 2021

The structure seems to have remained relatively unaltered since its construction in the early nineteenth century and retains many of its original fixtures and fittings, although its original guttering has been removed and replaced with plastic.

The Gardeners' Complex – Bottom Yard

Situated at the heart of the site are the adapted remains of the gardeners complex, known as Bottom Yard. The buildings comprise two much altered, parallel, linear brick structures set within a courtyard of c.1870, bounded to the south by a substantial stone wall, of unknown date.

The southern range has been almost entirely rebuilt to form a pair of semi detached dwellings, with substantial extensions to their rear, and can be dated to a planning permission granted in 2013. There is partial evidence for the earlier cowshed in the construction of the northern house, where the bricks are of a more consistent darker red and are of the Flemish stretcher bond variation seen in the wings of the main house.



Figure 31: The converted remains of the cowshed into two domestic residences (left) and the Bottom Yard complex, showing the long barn and evidence of the raised roof on its north gable end (right)

The eastern range is formed by a former barn with a corrugated iron roof lean-to on the eastern elevation and a series of wide arch-headed openings facing onto the central yard. The brick work clearly shows that the roof height of the barn was raised to create a first floor, probably in the 1990s. The building is of garden wall brick bond and paler bricks which suggest the extension is contemporary with some of the small square structures which had been added to the house and servant wings by 1901. There are no openings in the western elevation and it is flanked by a large catslide roofed wooden lean-to.

Adjacent to the drive leading across the gardens are a series of three flat roofed garage structures which appear to be contemporary with the construction of the dwellings in 2013.

The Walled Garden

Map evidence suggests that the walled garden originally dates from the early 19th century, but there has been extensive loss of walls to the south and west. The remnants of the wall are constructed in the local variation of Flemish stretcher wall bond, with square full height pilasters every c. 4m. The surviving eastern section of the wall stands to c.2m in places, but may have been reduced in height, as there is no evidence of any coping. The wall corners appear to have been stepped up by a further 5 courses, a feature also evident to the side of the bothie, a small 19th century brick building constructed to the rear of the north wall.

The bothie was adapted and incorporated into a three bedroom dwelling in 1993 and a section of the original building can still be identified as a darker red section in the east wall of the property, constructed in the local version of the Flemish stretcher brick bond, and probably dating to the 1870's.

Replacing the 1870's glass house along the southern elevation of the structures north wall, is a large open sided shed of wood and corrugated iron with a single pitch roof.



Figure 32: The converted Bothie (left) and the remains of the eastern boundary of the walled garden in 2020 & 2021 (right)

The Gardens and approaches

All of the structures are set within a designed garden comprising an intricate path network, a series of sunken features, stone revetment walls, ditched haha's and exotic plantings. These combine to provide a distinct, Picturesque-inspired setting to the listed structure and its curtilage.

Whilst any nuancing of the original planting scheme is currently not visible, the odd shrub or exotic such as bamboo and laurel, hint at earlier designs and possible Chinese influences. However, what does remain are predominately evergreen trees: stately specimen coniferous trees, cedars and pines, that retain a prominence in the landscape, especially in the winter.

The site is extremely overgrown, and without further survey, a cohesive plan is hard to discern, however there is a density of evergreen trees to the rear of the house, screening the wings, as well as groups formed along the western boundary and around the dingle to the north of the site. Most of the planting appears to be either contemporary with the 19th century construction and

development of the house and gardens, although later plantings are evident between the walled garden and Bottom Yard, in proximity to the house.



Figure 33: View looking northwards showing the predominance of evergreens of the site, particularly along its western edge

The sinuous path network, which is first shown on mapping at in the late 19th century, is still largely extant with some evidence of metalled surfaces, especially along the western edge of the garden. As the house sits on a low rise, the gardens include a series of terraces, especially in the west, as the site falls away to Neachley Lane. The pathways are sunken and have a rustic, Picturesque feel, reinforced by the use of sandstone walls, comprising stacked boulders, as distinct and characteristic edging. This feature is also seen in elements such as banking forming part of the dingle and the base of the knoll.



Figure 34: The boulder revetment in the Dingle (left) the stacked stone revetment forming part of one of the sunken pathways through the western part of the garden (right)

The most dramatic feature in the garden is known as the Dingle, possibly a relict marl pit, which is located to the north of the site. Shaded by soaring evergreen specimen trees, this steep sided feature culminates in a pond at its base and was clearly intended to be a key attraction within the gardens. Little evidence remains as to how this feature was presented but, given the predominance of shade all year round, it is unlikely to have supported bedding plants, although its planting may have extended to some alpine species, a trend that was prevalent in gardens in the 19th century (Uglow, 2005).

The key design feature in the South of the gardens are the lawns that flank the main house on three sides and support extended views from the house across the Shropshire countryside to the South and East. Both of these key views are now impacted by unmanaged vegetation and natural regeneration, with self-seeded trees dotting the lawns. However features that supported these views are still extant within the landscape in the shape of a rudimentary ditched ha-ha to the south of the house and a terrace, that forms part of the sunken lawn, to the East.

Supporting and framing all of these features are the two main approaches to the property from Long Lane and Neachley Lane. These remain strongly visible in the landscape, although the emphasis of use appears to have moved to the back access approached from Neachley Lane in recent times, and as a result, the long avenue is becoming overgrown and more indistinct, with a number of gaps appearing in the formal planting (figure 35).



Figure 35: Left: View along the Lime Avenue, looking North and (right) view within the Dingle

The Lodge

Situated on Long Lane is a semi-detached domestic dwelling known as the Lodge, which dates from the 1870s. The building is in a rustic irregular red sandstone with alternating blond and red sandstone ashlar quoins and sill and lintel details. Above is a tiled gable roof with a central ridge stack, punctuated by three gabled dormers with square casement windows. At ground floor level there are a further three windows with stone transoms and mullions, each having two lights with individual arched heads. This design is typical of the period and was widely adopted for use in estate buildings in the later 19th century (see Loudon, 1869).

The Lodge has been extended substantially over the 50 years, and is more than double its original size. These alterations are in a style that is in-keeping with the original building but varies in details such as the grain and composition of the walling and the detailing of the windows.



Figure 36: West elevation of the Lodge at the Long Lane entrance, viewed from the Avenue

Boundary Wall

To either side of the Lodge entrance are two large gate piers, which punctuate a long wall of red sandstone ashlar, capped with a semi-circular coping stone that forms the boundary to the estate along Long Lane. There are also remnants of sections of metal estate railings found in ad hoc locations in the east park, although non appear to be in situ and may have been moved as part of the WW2 occupation of the site.

World War II and Parkland

The expansion of RAF Cosford, which took place from 1938, included the commandeering of east and south park at Neach Hill for a substantial network of structures. In the East Park, a number of brick and cement rendered structures are still evident within the landscape, some of which are in relatively good condition, masked and protected by naturally regenerated secondary woodland. All of the structures in East Park shown on 1964 mapping are still identifiable on the ground. The most easily recognisable military building is a semi-subterranean rectangular brick structure, accessed at its centre on both sides by brick lined passages, with banked earth to the top of each brick elevation. These are blast shelters that were used to temporarily shelter personnel during air raids (figure 37).



Figure 37: Well preserved remains of an RAF Blast shelter which are still evident in the woodland of East Park (left) and the remains of more substantial above ground structure (right)

In addition three other buildings are located to the east of the house in the woodland. A large single storey square brick storage structure with a large entrance on its eastern elevation and a corrugated iron gable roof, stands at the top of the east lawn, adjacent to the line of the relict military access road. The structure is surrounded by a brick wall equal in height to its side elevation, possibly

unroofed. At its open end it is connected to the structure by a wooden partition and a door that provides access to the area between the structure and the wall. The brickwork is garden wall bond and likely to date to the 20th century, and may relate to the military occupation of the site. In this location there are also a number of brick-lined 'man hole' sized hatches, the function of which are as yet unidentified.

Further south within east park, in line with the main house, are the remains of a building that is clearly of the same fabrication and brickwork as the subterranean military structures, but far more substantial in nature and lies wholly above ground. It is in a very poor condition with only half of it still standing but it appears to be of a single storey construction with a substantial concrete slab flat roof, concrete lintels and in places concrete render (figure 37).

Further research is needed to establish if there is a correlation between the physical remains, which correspond with features shown on the 1964 maps, and the barrack buildings identified on a composite map of RAF Cosford's development (Francis, 2012).

The remains of one other building was identified in the woodland and appears to correspond with a structure first shown on the 1902 Ordnance survey, on the northern boundary of east park. Unfortunately it is an extremely ephemeral structure, built of pitch pine timbers and sheets of cast iron, and is derelict.

4. Assessment of Significance

This assessment of significance is based on the principles set out in *Conservation Principles* (English Heritage 2008) which state that the significance of heritage assets derives from the ‘heritage values’ that they possess, which may be *evidential, historical (either illustrative or associative), aesthetic or communal*. The National Planning Policy Framework defines ‘heritage significance’ as the ‘*value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting*’ (MHCLG 2018, 71)

Summary of Significance

The significance of Neach Hill is recognised in its designation as a Grade II listed building, which acknowledges that it is of national significance for its architectural and historic interest.

The significance relates not only to the Main House, but to elements of the wider Neach Hill estate, specifically including the relatively untouched Coach House, formal gardens and parkland, all of which form a fundamental part of its setting and character.

Although a number of features have been stolen or damaged, the condition of the Main House does not diminish this significance and there is considerable potential for the reinstatement of lost features from further historic building and landscape archaeological investigation.

The historic associations with RAF Cosford in WWII, alongside the extent and state of preservation of the remains in the parkland are, in their own right, also of likely national significance.

Architectural & Aesthetic Value

In terms of architectural value, the principal building (and attached servants wings) are significant as a good example of a country gentleman’s classically designed residence of the early 19th century which, although adapted and augmented in the 1870s, has remained largely unaltered. Its significance is impacted by the level of dereliction that has occurred, especially the substantial loss of the roof and many of the internal fixtures and fittings in the primary rooms, however sufficient information remains, in both physical and documentary forms, to provide a very clear understanding of the earliest design and its evolution.

Other elements within the site also make a contribution to the architectural significance of the building and its setting. In particular, the Coach House is a largely unaltered building with strong stylistic and functional connections to the main house and the earliest phase of construction in the early 19th century. The Lodge, Walled Garden and Bottom Yard - despite being much altered - through association, and their residual standing remains, also continue to play a part in the overall design intentions of the property and contribute to the architectural interest of the Site and its development over time.

In terms of the house’s wider context, the formal gardens and parkland provide an aesthetic backdrop to the Principal Building. The fundamental structural aspects of its design, such as the sunken gardens, shrubberies and pathways, knoll, avenue, ha-ha, lawns and dingle, are characteristic of the Picturesque movement but sit neatly alongside more functional aspects, such as the gardeners compound, which reflect the gardens developing infrastructure in line with the latest trends in horticulture in the later 19th century. Despite being very overgrown, the garden has a strong sense of its original design intentions and much of the designed landscape is still legible.

The development of east and south park during WWII has had a minimal impact on the appearance of the wider parkland, and has not diminished the aesthetic value of the parkland in terms of designed views.

Historic Value

The special historic interest of the house and estate at Neach Hill lies not only in the history and development of the site from its origins in the early 19th century, but also in its connections with local gentry and other great houses in the area. It also has value through its association with individuals of note, such as the railway artist Isaac Shaw and the architects Bidlake and Fleeming who prepared the drawings for the late 19th century interventions.

Of particular significance is the part that the Site played in the expansion and development of RAF Cosford, following its requisition during the Second World War. RAF Cosford was the first purpose – built School of Technical Training, and during the war over 70,000 engine and airframe mechanics and armourers attended courses at the site. The blast shelters and wider infrastructure represent a link with the wartime history of the hall and its parkland and their condition and the sheer number of them represent a rare survival. However, their relationship with a very significant WW2 RAF station which, rarely for airfields, has a number of listed airfield structures, is also of high historic value. Further investigations to establish whether the Site can be directly related to the activities of 9 MU (who were directly connected to Spitfire production at Castle Bromwich), the No.2 School of Technical Training, or the Czech Air Force depot known to have been at Cosford would further enhance this significance.

Evidential Value

As a country house built on agricultural land in the early 19th century, Neach Hill has a relatively short time-depth, particularly when compared with other properties of this status in the locality. However, as a house and estate with many of its core components remaining relatively unaltered since their construction, there is clear evidential value in the physical remains of the upstanding buildings and their alterations. In addition, the documentary evidence, in the form of maps, plans, deeds and wills, help provide a relatively detailed understanding of how and when the house was originally conceived and how it transitioned into the Victorian period.

The survival of architectural drawings from the later 19th century add to the evidential value of the site's significance by providing information about the alterations which were considered – if not all enacted – at the property at this time, and help inform an understanding of the building's evolution.

A similar narrative is played out in relation to the archaeological evidence for the evolution of the garden, which have high evidential value in terms of their potential for the identification of changes in path networks, and below ground evidence for the structural remains of glasshouses, fountains and garden structures. These combine with the arboricultural evidence provided by the extant tree planting, such as the use of exotics to draw attention and add interest, as well as the use of native species to frame and protect views.

The remains of the WW2 features in east and south park also have a high evidential value in the context of their state of preservation which allow a far greater understanding of the scale of the war effort and its impact on RAF Cosford and the surrounding landscape.

Communal/Cultural Value

In terms of its communal value, the key significance of the site primarily lies in its role in the war effort and its connections to RAF Cosford. This includes the cultural value derived from the people that may still have ties and memories of the Site through the wartime and post war periods.

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Appendix A: National Heritage List for England Entry

Overview

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number:1273836

Date first listed: 26-Sep-1984

Statutory Address: Neach Hill, Long Lane, Neachley, TF11 8PJ

This copy shows the entry on 05-Feb-2021 at 09:00:41.

Statutory Address: Neach Hill, Long Lane, Neachley, TF11 8PJ

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

District: Shropshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Donington

National Grid Reference: SJ 79050 06295

Summary

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

DONINGTON LONG LANE (North side) Neach Hill. Country house, now partly used as antique showrooms. Circa 1830-40. Stucco; first floor sill band, corner pilasters reeded with central staff moulding, low pitched hipped slate roof with wide spreading eaves and moulded cornice projecting at the corners; two central axial ridge stacks, integral lateral stacks to left and right.

Three storeys; five architraved glazing bar sash windows, reduced proportions to top floor, blind to two right hand bays; French windows to left of central C20 door under Greek Doric porch with coupled columns and recessed niches. Right-hand return of two storeys as are the two right hand bays of the main façade internally.

Listing NGR: SJ7905006295

Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number: 416976

Legacy System: LBS

Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

End of official listing

GENERAL NOTES

The architect takes no responsibility for any dimensions obtained by scaling from this drawing. If no dimension is shown, the recipient must ascertain the dimension specifically from the architect or by site measurement. All dimensions to be checked on site prior to construction and any discrepancies reported to architect immediately.

All drainage runs, connections, lines and levels are assumed, these to be confirmed on site prior to construction and agreed with relevant water authority.

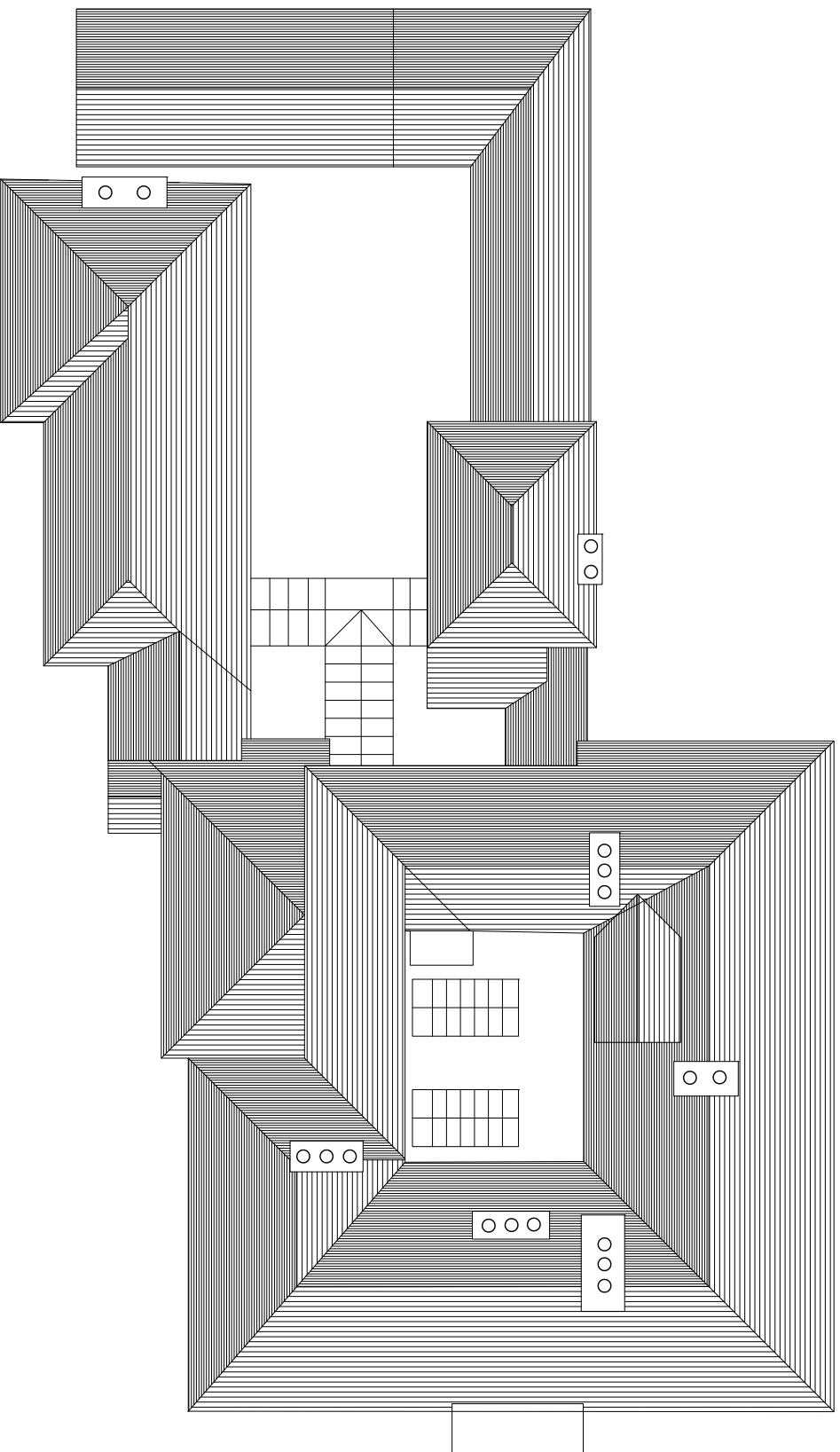
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Roof Plan
1:200 @A3

Revision: / XXX XXX.XXXXX

FEASIBILITY

Project Name:
Neach Hill House

Client:
Mr. S. Jessa

Drawing Title:
Roof Plan - As Existing

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Drawn By: C.S. Checked By: R.G. Date: DEC. 2020

Scale: 1:200 @ A3

Drawing No: 1116-01-102



Rev: /

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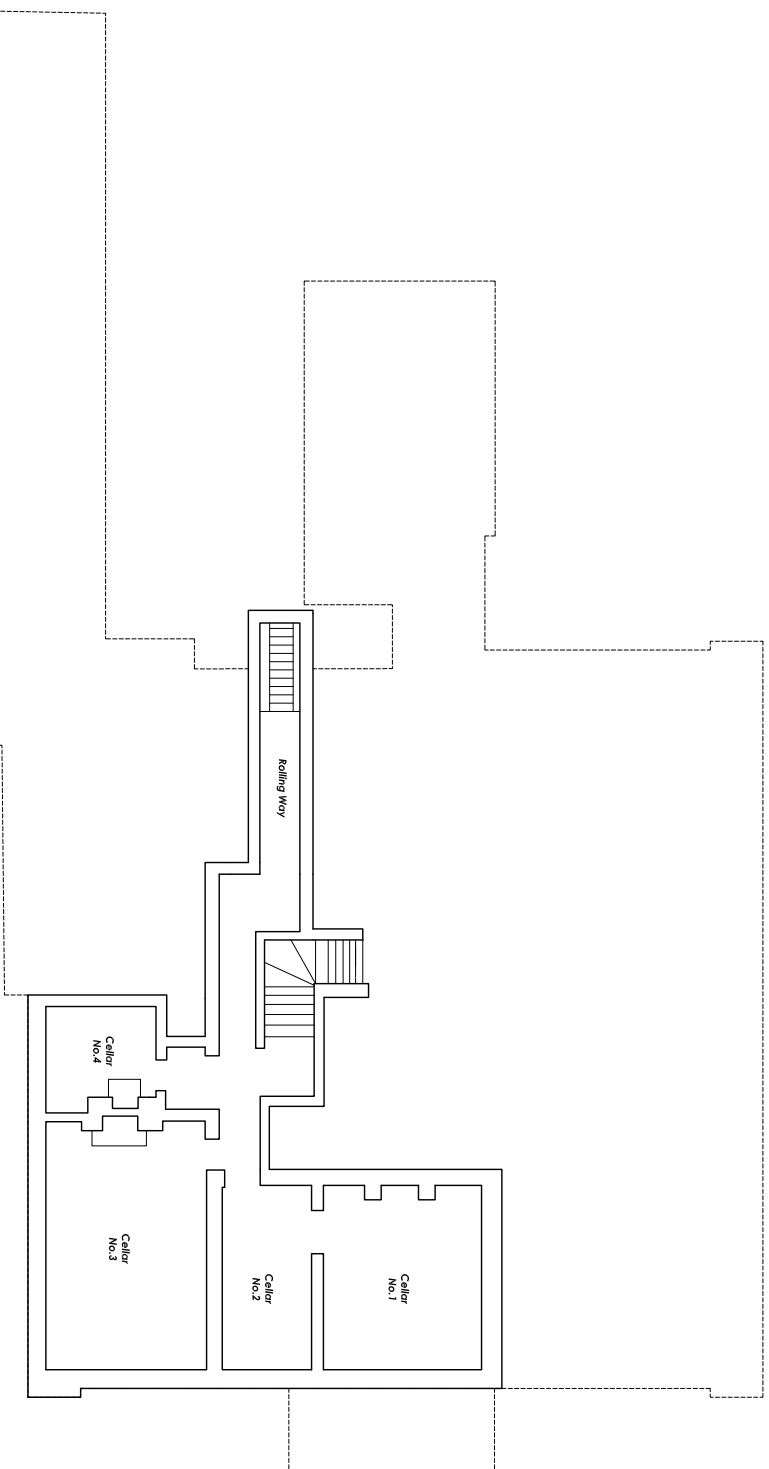
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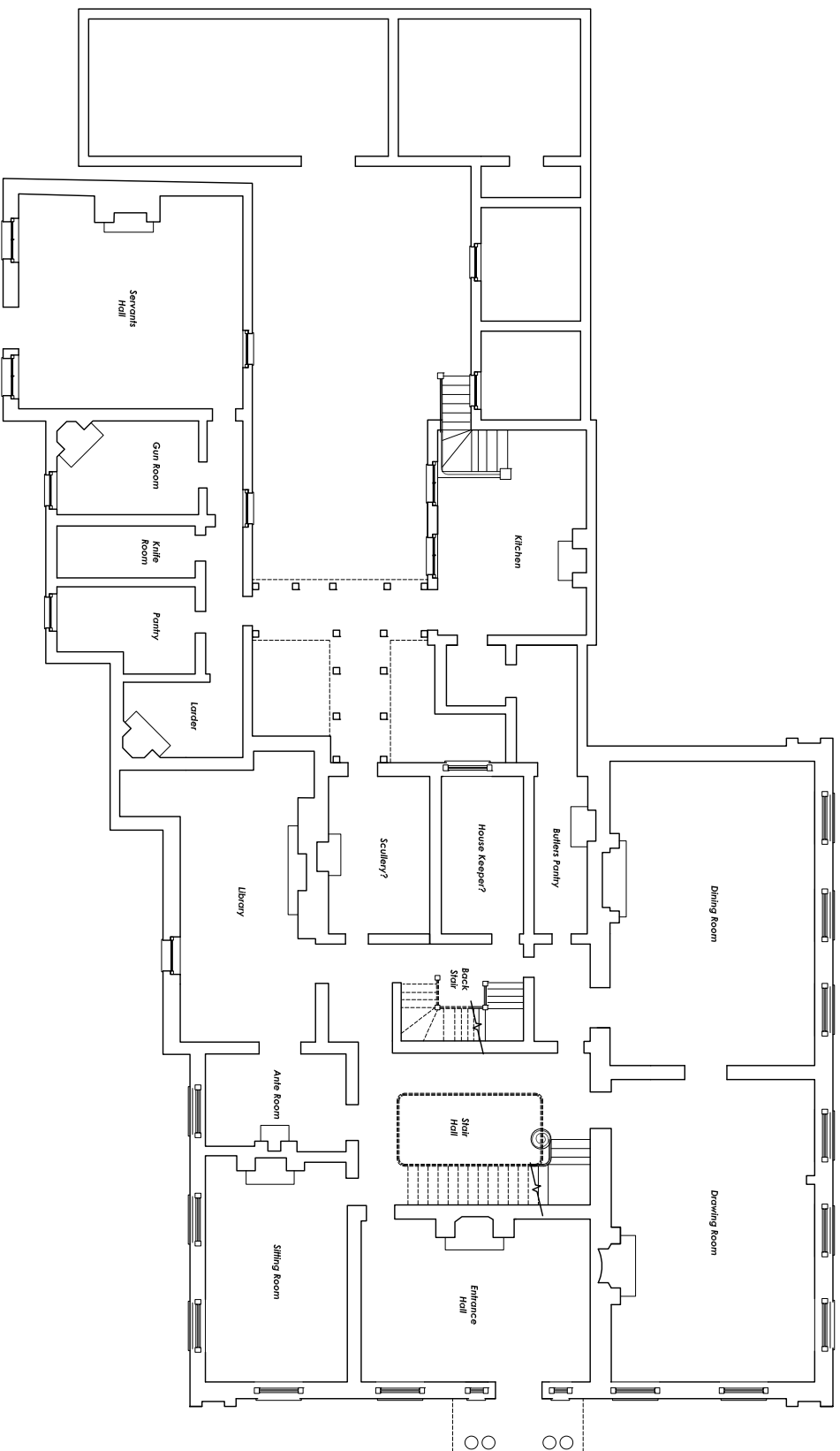
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Basement Floor Plan
1:200 @A3



Ground Floor Plan
1:200 @A3



Revision: / XXX XX.XX.XXXX

FEASIBILITY

Project Name: Neach Hill House

Client: Mr. S. Jessa

Drawing Title: Floor Plans - Sheet 01 - As Existing

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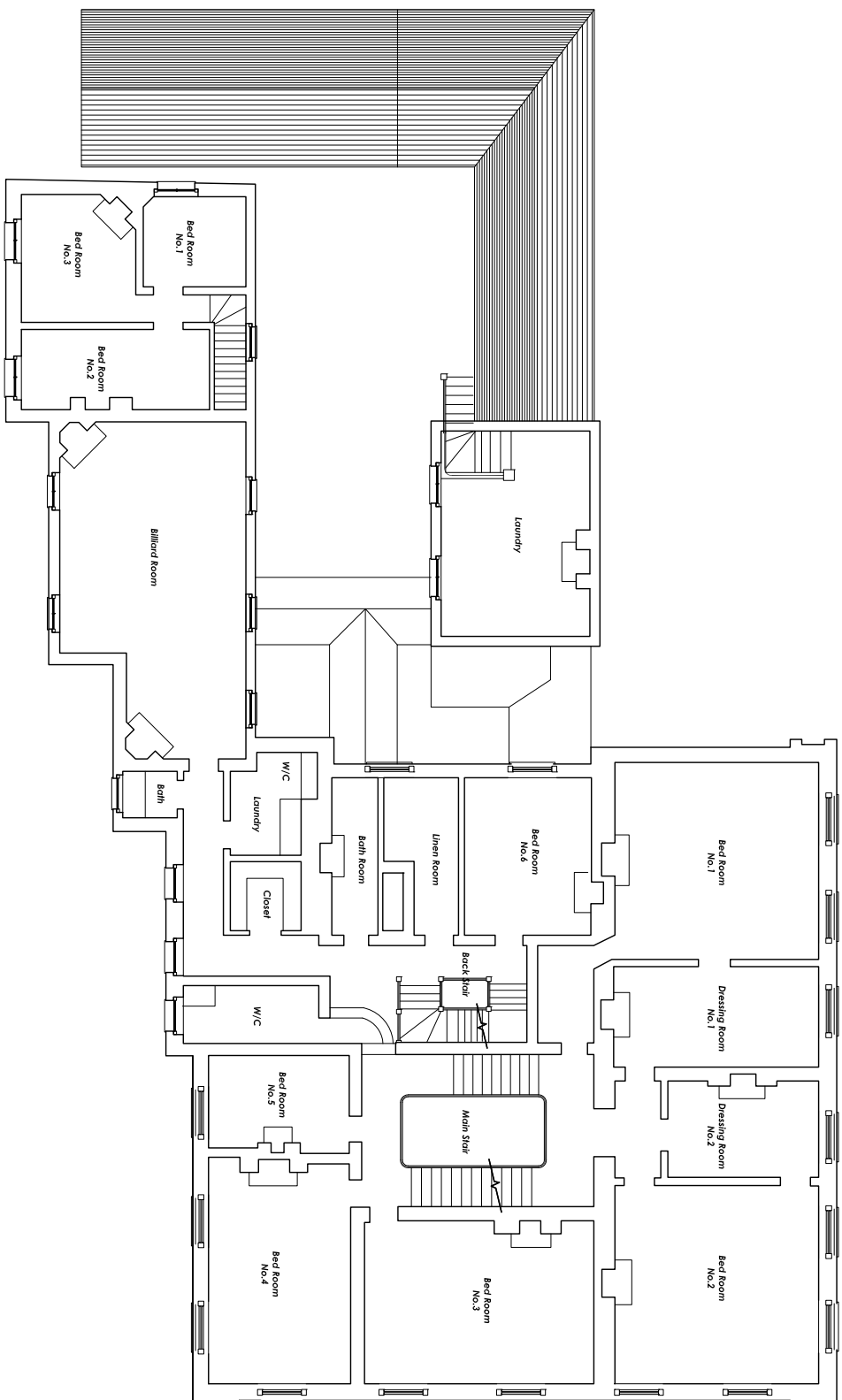
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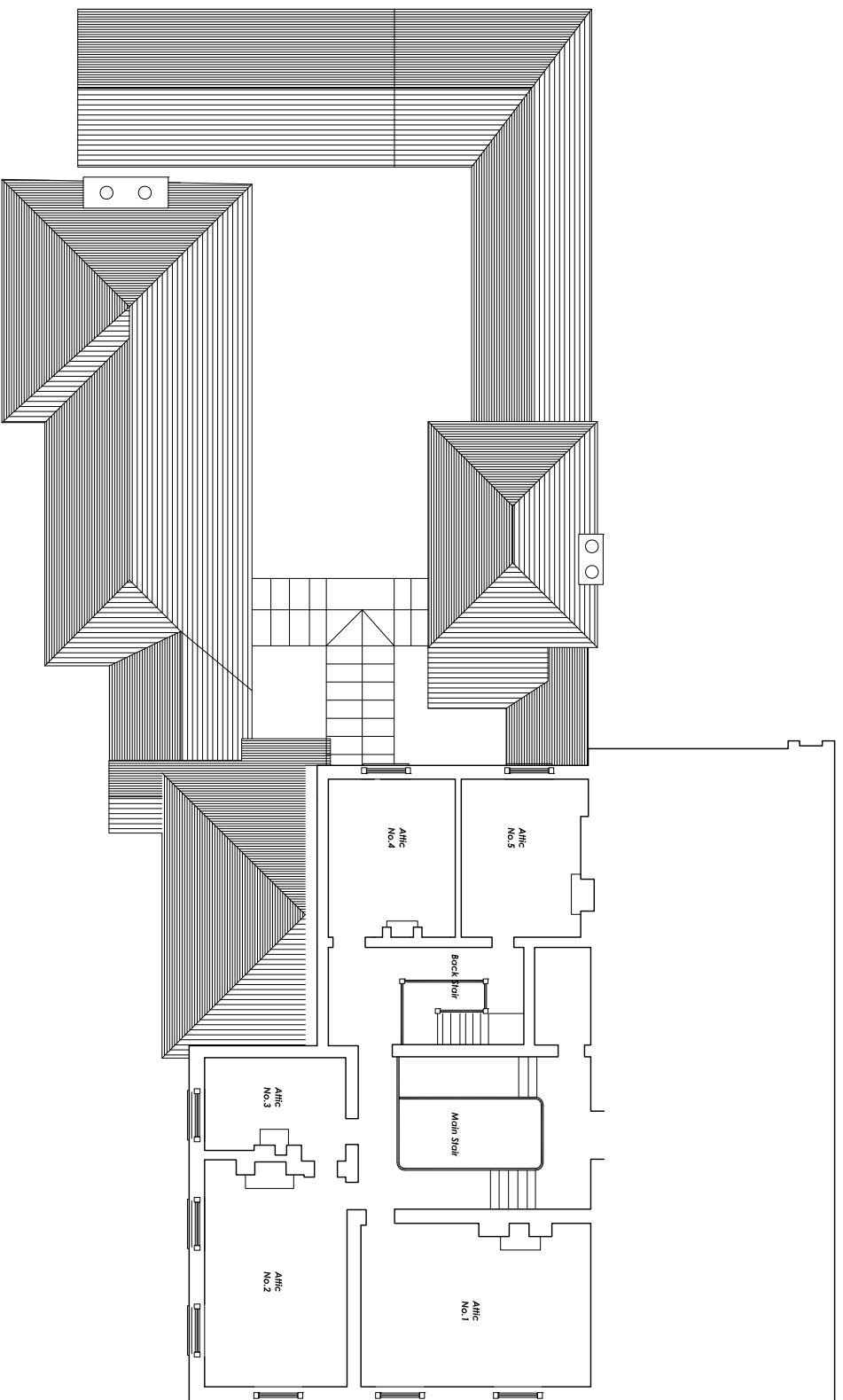
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First Floor Plan
1:200 @A3



Second Floor Plan
1:200 @A3



Revision: / XXX XXXXXX

FEASIBILITY

Project Name: Neach Hill House

Client: Mr. S. Jessa

Drawing Title: Floor Plans - Sheet 02 - As Existing

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